



Connecticut Department of Social Services

Update on DSS Service Modernization Progress

Commissioner Roderick L. Bremby

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The Department of Social Services' 'ConneCT' customer service modernization initiative is nearing the half-year point of operations after statewide launch on July 8. **One of the largest IT projects in state history, ConneCT is the first of a series of major changes** that will culminate in the complete replacement of the agency's antiquated eligibility management system by the end of 2015.

Along with business process improvements at DSS field offices, new staff and complex integration with Access Health CT, the ConneCT initiative represents a much-needed transformation in how DSS delivers services to approximately 750,000 Connecticut residents.

The necessity for this initiative was clear – the status quo was unacceptable to our clients and staff alike. DSS had been under-resourced and mired in archaic business processes for years, while snowed under by paper documents that swamped not only workers' desks but undercut application and renewal processing.

- I understand that it may be tempting for some to be nostalgic for the 'old' DSS, but we need to recall that the previous environment had long been broken. It was extremely frustrating and detrimental to many thousands of our clients. Twelve obsolete phone systems and overwhelmed voicemails often worked no better for clients than a can and string. There was no online access, and field offices were sometimes primitive service and working environments.
- **We are gradually changing all of that.** In general, the launch of DSS service modernization has been an extremely positive step. Previously, it was impossible for many DSS clients to reach individual workers, and there was no online or phone access to benefit accounts. Now, nearing the six-month point of ConneCT implementation, ***nearly 270,000 calls have been handled at the Benefits Centers***, with tens of thousands of clients getting the information they need from online or phone interactive voice-response systems without needing to speak to a worker.

- Ensuring that Connecticut citizens have effective and timely access to the services and supports administered by DSS is our top priority. We work to resolve all customer service issues and intervention requests from clients and service partners.

However, it's an understatement to say that we are not yet where we want to be. One of the biggest challenges is making sure that the continuing influx of applications and redeterminations (now electronically distributed throughout the 12 offices) is addressed more quickly.

Once this is achieved on a more consistent basis, we can expect that calls to workers in our Benefits Centers, and accompanying wait times, will decrease. Currently, systems and processing issues are driving excessive call volume levels.

While pointing out that DSS is not in this alone – we have external dependencies in the IT area – I am not satisfied with the stability of the system to date. ConneCT is 'down' too often, or operating sluggishly, resulting in periods when DSS staff cannot work the cases in the electronic distribution promptly, if at all. Collectively, we are working on complete remediation of these problems.

On the positive side, we have been working through individual **production** issues as they come up. For example:

- Document scanning capacity is fully resolved and is occurring on time. **The scanning backlog has been eliminated for quite some time now.**
- Tracking and indexing of documents is also resolved.
- Our vendors are conducting daily reconciliations that ensure that all documents scanned that day are available for viewing by the next business day.
- Electronic workflow is distributed by document type. Redetermination documents, for instance, now have a dedicated 'queue where workers can access those documents to be processed more efficiently.

The Department would be grateful for help in promoting alternatives to calling a Benefits Center worker, all of which will help ease the current strain on the Benefits Centers and provide help right when you or others need it:

- ◆ **Set up a MyAccount.** Current DSS clients can visit www.connect.ct.gov to set up online accounts and get benefit information without visiting their local DSS office. This is a quick process, and enables individuals to get information immediately and on a 24-hour

basis. Nearly 50,000 online accounts have been opened to date. A new service eligibility pre-screening tool is also available to assist clients and potential applicants.

- ♦ **Use the integrated voice-response (IVR) phone system.** Call the DSS client information line at 1-855-6-CONNECT to use an IVR line to self-serve. Clients can set up a phone benefits account to self-serve, 24/7. Over 86,000 phone accounts have been opened to date.
- ♦ **Visit a field office.** DSS services are available at 12 offices statewide. For a list, please visit www.ct.gov/dss and click on Regional Offices, or call 2-1-1 for referral.

In summary, we are working daily to bring ConneCT up to full function. As early as January, we expect to roll out the final new feature of ConneCT – **launch of online applications, redeterminations and reporting changes.**

We are currently testing the online application with **service partners such as End Hunger Connecticut and nursing home representatives.** This will be a monumental step forward in customer access to the department and our services.

While acknowledging the challenges implicit in massive system change, I believe that it is important also to recognize the overall improvement in client access to the Department of Social Services to date. The improvements have surpassed the difficulties. As we continue to move this system forward over the coming months, we appreciate the work of service partners and advocates on behalf of our mutual clients.